



Attachment to Submission

Corporate Parenting, Attachment, and the Child Safety → Youth Justice Pipeline

Submitted by: 

Capacity: Practitioner in education, behaviour support and youth services

Purpose of this attachment

This attachment expands on my primary submission by outlining how system design, particularly within non-family-based (residential) care, contributes to predictable pathways from child safety involvement into youth justice. It is informed by attachment theory, practice experience, and observation of repeated systemic patterns.

Corporate parenting: more than placement

Corporate parenting should mirror what is expected of any effective parent: stability, emotional safety, advocacy, guidance, and preparation for adulthood. In practice, many young people in care experience the opposite, instability, relational loss, and responses driven by risk management rather than development.

Where a system prioritises compliance over connection, children learn that relationships are conditional and temporary. For children with existing trauma histories, this reinforces survival behaviours rather than supporting growth.

Residential care and relational failure

Non-family-based care is often characterised by:

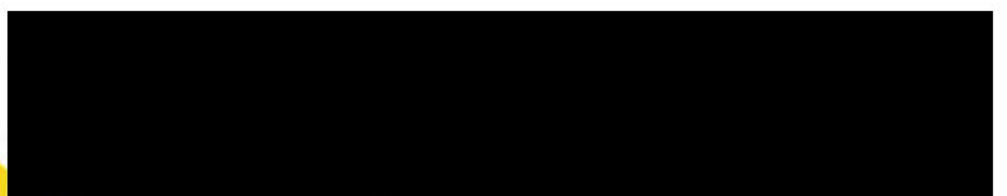
- rotating staff rather than enduring adult relationships
- frequent peer and placement changes
- rule-heavy environments with limited agency
- escalation to police involvement during behavioural crises


From an attachment perspective, these environments undermine felt safety. Behaviour that is interpreted as defiance is often dysregulation or grief expressed in the only way the young person knows how. When distress is criminalised, the system unintentionally teaches children that punishment is the primary response to need.

The child safety → youth justice pipeline

The link between child safety and youth justice is not accidental. It is a foreseeable outcome of cumulative relational harm and system responses. A common pathway includes:

1. early trauma and attachment disruption
2. placement instability and repeated loss
3. school disengagement and unmet developmental needs
4. escalating survival behaviours



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5. police involvement as behavioural management
 6. youth justice contacts and identity shift to “offender”

For some young people, detention becomes the most predictable and emotionally regulated environment they have experienced. This should be understood as a systems failure, not a personal one.

Young people as an underutilised resource

Young people in care and youth justice are routinely viewed through a risk lens. This obscures their capacity to contribute, lead and thrive when given safety, connection and opportunity. Many demonstrate resilience, creativity and leadership once environments support belonging, agency and purpose.

When systems focus primarily on containment, we suppress potential rather than cultivate it — at great social and economic cost.


Prevention, not reaction


Australia invests billions annually responding to child protection, youth justice, mental health and family violence crises. Evidence and experience consistently show that prevention, early intervention, stable relationships, integrated supports and therapeutic environments costs less and achieves more.

Effective corporate parenting requires:

- prioritising relationship as the primary intervention
- reducing the criminalisation of behavioural distress
- ensuring residential care is genuinely therapeutic in practice, not just name
- coordinated, single plans for young people involved across systems
- strong transition supports from detention to care and from care to adulthood

Practice-informed prevention in action

Alongside my practice work, 

 The model is designed as a preventative, relationship-based alternative to traditional residential care and detention pathways.

The intent is to create a stable, community-based environment where young people experience continuity of relationships, meaningful routines, skill development and a sense of belonging — addressing the attachment and developmental needs that are often unmet in existing systems.

This work reflects a growing recognition that prevention-focused, therapeutic environments are more effective and less costly than crisis-driven responses. Regardless of funding outcomes, the model illustrates what is possible when systems are designed around connection rather than containment.



Closing reflection





Children in care who enter youth justice are not choosing crime over care; they are choosing predictability, safety and belonging where those needs have not been met elsewhere. If we want different outcomes, we must design systems that meet developmental needs rather than punish their expression.

No child should believe that detention is the safest place they belong.

Kind regards,

